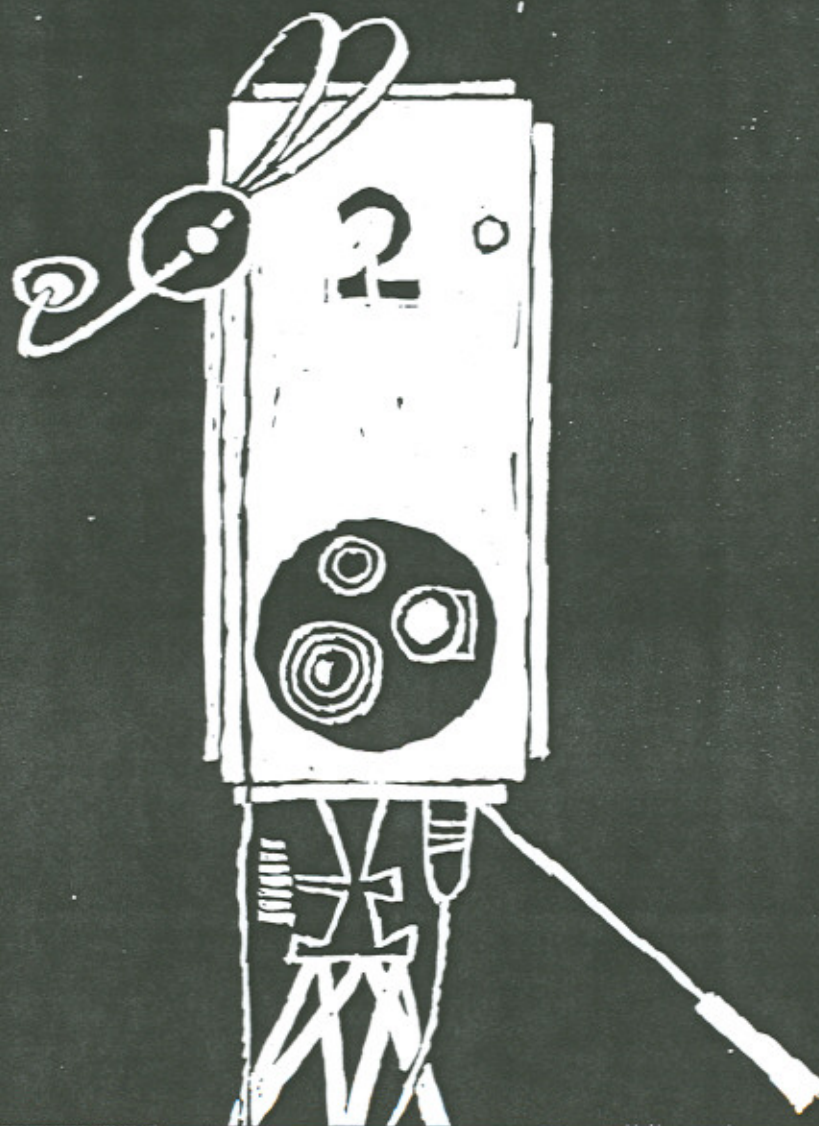


CAMERA MOVEMENT
AND COMPOSITION
IN TELEVISION



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CHAPTER XIII

CAMERA MOVEMENT AND COMPOSITION IN TELEVISION

CAMERA MOVEMENT

In television, there are usually two types of movement — camera movement and subject movement. Generally, camera movement is dependent on subject movement. In any case, camera and subject movements should always have a fluidity which will enable them to complement each other. Smoothness of operation is the key to good camera movement.

The choice in many cases, other than cutting, is camera movement. For all practical purposes, these can be grouped into the following main types of movement:

1. The Pan
2. The Dolly
3. The Truck
4. The Tilt

These camera moves present difficulties not usually apparent to the inexperienced director. Moving a camera, in the first place, is time-consuming, and, secondly, considerable pre-program planning is involved.

If camera moves are not carefully planned, last minute complications will arise. The movement will disturb performers, cause shadows and get into the frames of other cameras. A cameraman must always be warned, if movement is to be used. A simple cut is always easier. Long pans and dollies can easily dull and slow down an otherwise well-paced show. On the other hand, a show without camera movement will appear static.

As with the cut, camera movement can be overdone. Movement without definite purpose should not be attempted. Only if the movement improves the shot, should it be used. The stage rule of motivation for an actor's movement applies equally to the camera. The viewer must never be allowed to feel that he is being pulled needlessly around the set.

Another reason for avoiding too much camera movement is the fact that it gives an effect not common to the normal use of the eyes. A person's eyes do not function in a slow pan to an object. The glance is tossed to an object of particular interest. When a noise is heard, for example, eyes are immediately thrown in the direction of the cause of the sound. The cut reproduces this visual reaction; the pan does not. Interim areas are left out in the normal use of the eyes.

THE PAN

The pan shot, or panning, is the movement of the camera on its axis, in a lateral plane, either to the right or to the left. Properly used, panning is a valuable device, but it should not be used without reason. The pan shot has its place and, at times, is a virtual necessity, but it should always be properly motivated.

Panning is normally used to carry action, but it is also useful in scenes without action, such as giving the viewer a comprehensive look at an extensive scene. An orientation shot, in which the camera moves from one side of a vast scene to the far side, in order to emphasize the extent of the area, is excellent use of the panning device. This type of panning will also indicate the relative distance between objects.

When possible, panning should be made from left to right. The eye is accustomed to move in this direction.

Panning, as stated before, is valuable for carrying action. It is logical to pan with a subject as it moves. During the pan, the subject should be kept in the same area in the camera frame. The camera should also lead the moving subject — more space in front of it than behind — to show where the subject is going. Any necessary correction in composition should be made while the subject and camera are moving. Once they stop, readjustments will be more obvious to the viewer.

Uniform speed should be maintained while panning, since lack of smoothness will be disconcerting. The rate of movement should be made in accordance with the action of the subject and carried through to completion. A pan must always be completed. A pan should not backtrack over an area already shown, unless it is absolutely necessary.

The whip or blur pan is the result of too much speed in executing the pan shot. Panning at high speed so as to produce a blur is not usually seen in television, except in dramatic shows for a fast sweep to a forceful element. This type of pan is used more extensively in newsreels to indicate swift changes of scene.

Panning can be used to catch reaction. If an actor glances at something off scene, the director must decide whether a cut or a pan should be used so that the audience can also view the subject with the actor. Generally, a cut will be the choice, but, in a situation, for instance, in which an actor faces toward a strange sound and an expression of fear is the reaction, a time-consuming pan to the source will add greatly to the suspense.

A cut must never be made from a panning to a non-panning camera; from a non-panning to a panning camera. A cut can be made from one pan shot to another, if both cameras are panning at the same rate and in the corresponding direction.

A pan can also be used to correct balance, that is, when an element leaves a group. A slight pan right or left will re-balance the framing of objectives left in the group.

A pan is useful for the introduction of new subject matter. For example, when one member leaves a group, the pan can follow him and center on the new subjects he approaches (with the old subject leaving the frame). Seeking moving subjects to lead and pan to a new visual area is a good practical rule for the director to follow.

A director must always avoid panning over dull, uninteresting areas.

THE DOLLY

The dolly shot can be used to take a tighter shot as the camera pushes in to a specific portion of a scene. This is the dolly-in shot. In the reverse procedure, the dolly-back shot, the field of view expands visually as the camera pulls back to show a wider field of action.

For either type of dolly shot, the cameraman must always have proper alignment, otherwise, faulty execution will result. The ending point must be definite and correct and any change in composition should be made during the movement.

The dolly-back is very useful at the conclusion of a segment since it is a fitting ending to have the camera pulling back at the conclusion of a scene. This is especially true if the segment started with a long shot, followed by a dolly-in. A dolly-in or out will often provide variety in a time-consuming one shot.

If, at the start of a scene, a tight shot of some designation or symbol of what is to

happen is used, the camera can then dolly out to show where it is. This sudden swoop into a close-up of some vital object will expand its significance as it finally enlarges to fill the frame.

The dolly move also ties together the component parts of a scene as it goes past elements to gather attention on another. In certain circumstances, a cut might be disruptive, by focusing sudden attention on an object the viewer was not aware of in the preceding shot.

The zoomar lens produces an effect which appears to be the dolly shot. That is, the subject becomes larger or smaller in the frame. The zoomar has popular acceptance for remotes, especially for rapid action sporting events, where cutting cannot keep the audience orientated.

The electrashoot, in which action is electrically controlled by a switch, also has its uses in the studio. The effect of the dolly and the zoom is dissimilar inasmuch as during the dolly, the subject and perspective change. That is, near and distant objectives move in relation to the subject as the move takes place. During the zoom, neither the camera nor the perspective change. What the viewer sees is an increase or decrease in the size of the subject, due to change in focal length.

THE TRUCK

The truck shot is a shot moving alongside of the subject. The camera, for example, moves along with the actor as he moves on stage. This is also known as the travel shot and is useful for picking up such static elements as items displayed on a long platform — the camera traveling at right angles as far as needed in order to cover the objects.

A trucking movement will also add to the effect of depth when elements are in the foreground. Multiple movement appears to take place in front of the trucking camera; objects seem to move at varying speeds, depending on their relative positions. Objects close to the camera appear to have a quicker movement than those distant from the camera. This effect is often worthwhile and should be used whenever possible.

THE TILT

When the camera pans up and down, it is called tilting. This movement, like all others, must be skillfully executed and well motivated. It has the value of psychological impact when used in such instances as tilting from the base to the top of a building to emphasize height.

All camera movements discussed in this chapter are not single elements within themselves. They should be combined in one smooth flow as one move carries into another. The director should evaluate his still picture and, with camera movement, should constantly seek to project new drama and viewer interest into this still picture. Movement, however, should not be for its own sake. Movement should have reason — motivation.

COMPOSITION

Good composition is essential to the proper presentation of the television picture. Composition, in brief, is the arrangement of elements within the frame of the television screen.

It will be the purpose of this section to discuss the principles of composition, only as they apply to the medium of television. It would be wise to become familiar with the formal theory of composition, which can be found in any textbook on art, but it must

be remembered that the television picture is a moving one, so principles learned must be applied to an ever-changing movement of subject matter. Movement is vital to television, for the simple reason that the viewer will not be attracted and his interest held by non-movement. On the other hand, unmotivated, poorly composed movement will disturb composition, as well as the appreciation and enjoyment of the medium by the viewer.

Generally accepted theories of composition are merely guideposts. Adherence to rules of composition will provide a television picture containing form, balance and interest, but it will often be found necessary to break rules in order to achieve specific effects. If the picture accomplishes its intention, it automatically becomes proper composition. This is the cardinal test in composing for television — no other test will apply. As long as the director has captured the emotional mood of the story or situation in his composition — it is correct.

The director must not try to use too much theory in his approach to composition. Other art forms allow for complete and thorough handling of all details of composition, but in television a practical compromise must be effected between the ideal and the attainable within the time limits of the production. The director, of necessity, will be forced to accept less than the aesthetically perfect picture. The unrelenting clock will not allow him to accept only perfection. The director should expend every effort to compose individually attractive shots, but he must not forget that their basic purpose is to advance the story. He must not sacrifice story for isolated perfect compositions or try to tell too much in any one picture.

STRAIGHT FORWARD APPROACH

The practical director in television will understand that any addition to visual variety in his pictures is desirable. Yet, he should not introduce variety merely for its own sake; he should not clutter up good composition with too many elements. The quality of good composition, as in all great art, is simplicity.

In dressing the set, for example, only those objects which contribute to the mood pattern should be used. Nothing should be added that is non-essential; nothing which might overshadow the main point of interest. The subdued use of embellishments should be the criteria; competition between elements should be eliminated; primary interest objects should not be lost by intermingling with busy backgrounds.

Intricate effects, elaborate sets, odd angles — these have dramatic purpose only if they do not confuse the scene and do not compete with the focal point of interest to such an extent as to leave the viewer puzzled. A sound, practical rule to follow is to keep it simple.

THE SCREEN

One of the limitations in pictorial composition is the small size of the television screen. It is a rectangle, in the conventional proportion of four-to-three and the television director must learn to adapt his compositions to these rigid dimensions. This means that he should avoid cluttered sets or groupings. Sets and action should be kept as simple as possible, photographing, in most instances, important action in the central area of the frame.

The television director must also remember that a further shrinkage occurs along the edges of his frame during transmission and in the receiver of the home screen. In order to compensate for this loss, an additional ten percent should always be considered as unusable area on the margins of the control room monitors.

FIELD OF VIEW

The field of view refers to that portion of the scene which appears on the frame and has the following classifications:

Extreme Long Shot
Long Shot
Medium Shot
Close-up
Extreme Close-up

There is no precise distinction or dividing line between these various shots. In composing for television, the director must remember that the home screen is relatively small and that in long shots — sometimes even in medium long shots — facial expressions are not readily identified.

In the long shot, distinct space will appear above and below the full figure. It will show the whole subject and the relative position of other elements in the picture. In the medium shot, the figure will be shown from the knees up or from the waist up, or from some area between these two points. The director should indicate waist or knee shot in order to avoid misunderstanding.

The medium close-up shot will include just the head and shoulders of the subject, and it is usually wise for the director to so indicate in his instructions to the cameraman. In the tight close-up, only the face of the subject is shown; in the insert close-up, only a part of the face, such as eyes or lips, appear on the screen.

The most commonly used shot in television is the medium shot. Most of the remaining shots will be close-ups, but the director should not neglect viewer orientation with necessary long shots to establish the basic scene of action.

The close-up shot is characterized by tight framing, that is, the subject is held in close to the sides of the frame. If the shot is too tight, cropping will take place (a portion of the subject will be lost, such as the head or ears). Cropping should be avoided, unless an extreme close-up of the eyes or a portion of the face is desired. Tight framing emphasizes importance and intimacy, and these are usually exploited to the maximum since they are more suitable to the television medium.

CAMERA ANGLES AND FRAMING

The two main approaches to television composition are the camera angle and framing.

1. The Camera Angle

The camera angle is the position of the camera relative to the subject. The normal angle of a shot is usually the viewpoint or eye level of an individual watching the scene. Variations from this normal angle can be high, low or side. A side angle can be combined with either high or low angles.

In composing with high vertical angles, the camera is raised to a higher pedestal and elements are viewed from above. This angle is excellent for dance sequences, since it conveys a feeling of depth and clarifies the viewer's orientation of the unfolding dance patterns. This angle also conveys a feeling of superiority to the viewer as the subject's illusion of strength and height are reduced.

As the camera is moved to a lower pedestal, subjects are viewed from below, making

LINES ON THE TELEVISION PICTURE

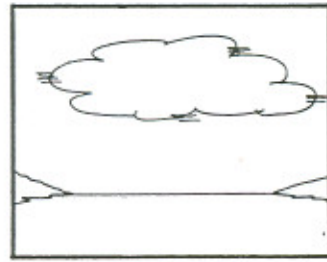
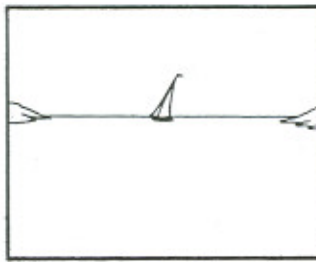
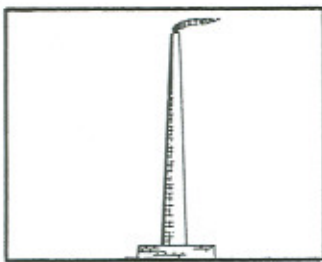
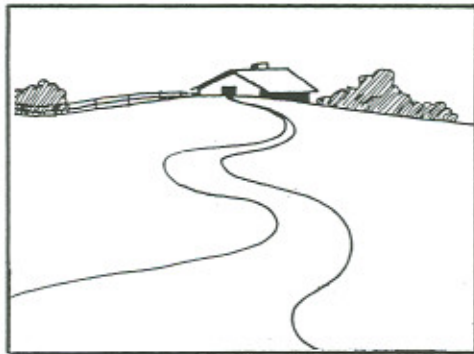


Diagram S

them more imposing, as well as exaggerating their height. This low angle will convey a feeling of inferiority of the audience and will also increase the apparent speed of a moving subject.

Moving the camera either right or left will often improve composition. These side angles will usually give depth and variety to subject matter, emphasizing objects closer to the lens and, in turn, weakening elements which are already in the background.

Where depth is not desired, the normal angle is always preferred. If angles tend to make the viewer want to square off in proper relationship to the subject, they are being improperly used. The director must never go overboard with angles — they must not be used for their own sake.

In summary, it should be remembered that the normal angle of a shot should be at the eye level of the individual within the scene. Definite angles should be used only for dramatic purposes. The camera angle of a newscaster at his desk, for example, should be at his eye level — not staring down at him just because it is easier for the cameraman to be on a higher pedestal. Angles have their place in relation to performers since most actors have a so-called "better side." It is the director's responsibility to find this and use it in as many shots as possible. Angles can also be used to de-emphasize or help eliminate undesirable facial features.

2. Framing

a. **Balance:** In framing the television picture, the director must always consider balance. In fact, a picture will not be properly framed until balance is sought and maintained.

Balance does not necessarily mean formal balance, in which equal weights are repeated at equal distances on each side of the frame. This type of symmetrical balance will tend to be monotonous and is not suitable for television viewing.

Informal symmetry, on the other hand, balancing equal weights with elements not identical in size and distance within the frame, is preferred. This type of symmetry will give a feeling of movement and the television director should always seek this dynamic approach in his composition.

Since the viewer needs a central point to attract his attention, each shot must have a center of interest or attraction. A dull center of attraction, however, placed in the geometrical center of the screen, should be avoided for the simple reason it will be too symmetrical and monotonous. Moving the point of interest to either side of the screen, without another element to oppose it, will not be a solution because the picture will then be out of balance.

In order to combat off balance caused by moving the point of interest to either side of the screen, it is good practice to set the center of attraction to a degree off the actual center of the picture and oppose it with another element in the remaining area. This is especially effective when balancing a performer with an object. The object in the picture balances the performer as the two share the frame. This is not the case when the performer or actor is addressing the camera from the center of the screen. In this case, he should be located in the center of the frame, to be in correct balance. The actor in this situation is the center of interest as far as the viewer is concerned and nothing should be added to counteract this center of attraction.

When an actor looks to an influence outside of the frame, in a three-quarter or profile direction, he should be balanced in such a way as to compensate for this shift

in the cast of his eyes and oblique facing. This can be accomplished by placing him so that the direction of his glance will have more empty space in its own side of the frame. This will re-establish balance in the scene. The same principle will apply when the actor looks up. The weight of the directed glance, despite its direction, will require more empty space on that side of the frame. In other words, the direction of interest has importance — not the area behind the performer.

b. **Lines:** Lines are usually present in every television picture. They can be up and down the screen, across it, or diagonal to the frame. The lines themselves can be of various types: straight, jagged or round. These lines have their own uses. Upright, straight lines are used for firmness or strength; jagged lines for disorder, and round lines for flow or grace in the set.

A director should not let the placement of lines destroy balance or composition. A strong vertical line down the middle of the screen, for example, will divide composition into two equal parts, resulting in two monotonous, similar pictures. For the same reason, horizontal lines should not divide the middle of the picture. These should cross in the higher or lower third of the frame in order to lend variety to the composition. The content of the upper or lower part of the frame will decide where the division should be made and it should be remembered that horizontal lines are usually associated with stability, while vertical lines are used for impressiveness. Lines adjacent and parallel to the edge of the frame should be avoided as they double-edge the frame.

Diagonal lines have a basic feeling of action. For this reason they break the frame less than vertical or horizontal lines. The diagonal is also dramatically interesting since the travel distance seems to be increased. While the diagonal move is useful for entrances and exits, it does not have the force of a perpendicular move. In many instances, the diagonal line can be useful in leading the eye of the viewer to a particular point of interest on the screen. This technique is especially effective in a scene where a winding road in the foreground of the frame is used to lead the attention of the viewer to the background — a house on top of a hill, the main point of interest. Long diagonal lines are always effective and should be used whenever possible, but they should not split the exact corner of the frame.

c. **Depth:** In television, the director will often stage with a view toward achieving the illusion of depth. He will do this in order to avoid the flat appearance which is the trademark of this two-dimensional medium.

In promoting this illusion of depth, there must be spatial balance between foreground and background, and this is achieved by placing elements at different distances. The director, however, must be careful not to allow distraction to take place. A strong element in the background, for example, can detract from the important center of attention in the foreground.

A useful device for suggesting a distant background is to place an element clearly in the middle area between the foreground and the background. This will create an impression of depth, a background receding into the distance.

In a long shot, composition for depth can be achieved in many cases by using an element in the foreground as part of the frame line, such as a branch, an arch, or other device. This prop will accentuate the foreground, at the same time giving depth by focusing attention on the distant background.

When the director arranges objects in front of each other, he must be sure that he never places them so that they seem to hide the background from the sight of the

DOMINANCE AND GROUP ARRANGEMENTS

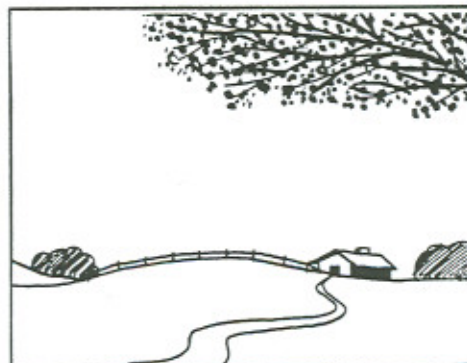
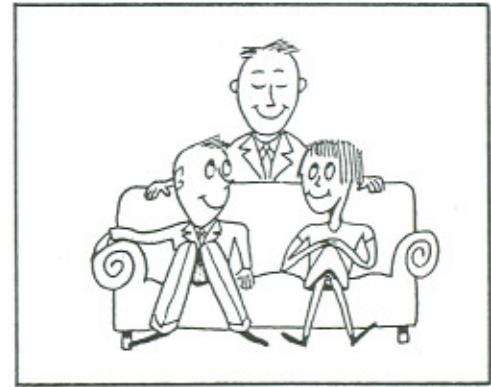
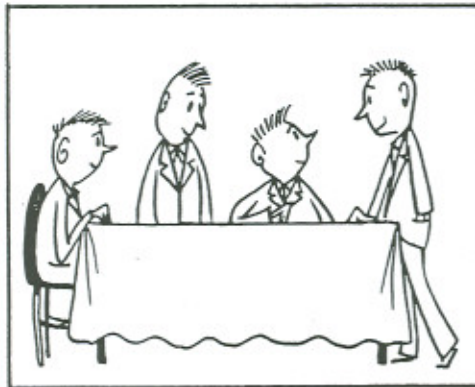
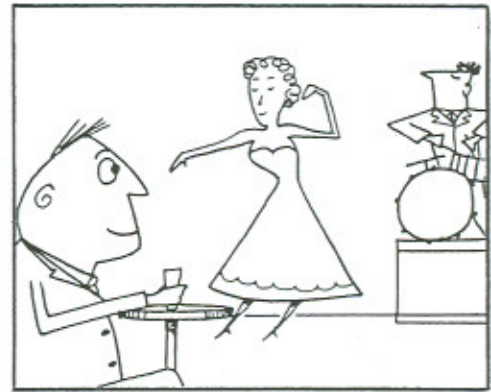


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viewer. Except for certain effects, objects placed in such an arrangement should never block the background.

A further point to remember is that prominent background lines should not appear to connect with a performer's head or other part of his anatomy. Background objects, also, should not appear to be growing on the performer, or give the effect that they are being worn. Stating it simply, close objects should not give the impression that they are connected to or are parts of distant objects.

What has been said about the placement of objects in a scene will also hold true for the placement of people. Placing one performer near the camera and another well behind him in the background, but clearly seen by the viewer, will not only achieve the effect of a long shot and a close-up in the same frame, but the relative difference in size and height of the two figures will add to the illusion of a third dimension.

d. **Dominance:** In most dramatic scenes, story value will require greater attention on one or several characters. The general rule for obtaining dominance, or emphasis, for a particular character is to place him in a higher position in the frame of the picture. A variation to this rule, for example, is an arrangement in which an actor, even in an isolated position at the base of the frame, or in a stronger body position than the others, can dominate the picture. Regardless of any rule, if all attention is thrown to one person, he can dominate the scene, despite his position in the frame.

Depending on story value, the television director can also gain a dominant position for an actor if he locates him close to a vertical shape or line. This definite use of contrast in composition will bring attention to the individual. Dominance will be even greater if appearance or gestures of the character are sharply different from the other actors in the picture. Any meaningful and purposeful use of contrast will focus interest on the individual.

e. **Group Arrangement:** The skill and instinct to arrange groups interestingly is the trademark of good composition. Static arrangements — all standing or sitting at the same level — result in dull pictures, lacking rhythm and variety. The good television director should always strive for comfortable and informal arrangements, but this should not be done at the expense of forced or awkward staging, not in keeping with the presentation. This should not rule out, however, certain formal groupings which require the rigidity of formality, such as court rooms, grouped chairs, and the like.

Many times, the television director can gain interesting pictures by placing his cast at different distances and heights. This gives variety and movement, but he must not inadvertently create distraction by competing points of interest.

The pyramid arrangement is probably the most effective device for accomplishing good composition with groups of individuals. This is a triangular pattern in which the actors are placed to form the shape of a loose triangle. Good shots generally result from such a schematic layout. They fill the frame in a comfortable, informal manner. The actor at the top of the triangle remains dominant unless a principle previously mentioned in this chapter diverts attention to another person or element in the scene.